

THE UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS  
DEPARTMENT OF SPEECH AND DRAMA

THE RHETORIC OF ISOLATION  
A STUDY OF SELECTED PRISON WRITINGS

by

Arnold David Payne

July, 1974

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BY  
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## DEDICATION

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.	ISOLATION AS A RHETORICAL SCENE . . . . .	1
II.	THE CHOICE OF RHETORICAL ACTION . . . . .	7
	A. George Jackson . . . . .	9
	B. Eldridge Cleaver . . . . .	18
	C. Towards a Model of Isolation Rhetoric . . . . .	24
III.	THE CHOICE OF RHETORICAL SELFHOOD . . . . .	30
	A. Jean Genet . . . . .	31
	B. Viktor Frankl . . . . .	40
	C. Expansion of the Model of Isolation Rhetoric . . . . .	46
IV.	THE DIMENSIONS OF A RHETORIC OF ISOLATION . . . . .	51
	A. Summary and Conclusions: The Model of Human Choices . . . . .	62

## THE RHETORIC OF ISOLATION

### A STUDY OF SELECTED PRISON WRITINGS

#### CHAPTER I

##### ISOLATION AS A RHETORICAL SCENE

One can designate isolation as a situation that prompts and produces a symbolic response. It is a human experience with a corresponding rhetoric. In this century, for example, instances of physical and psychological isolation have provided the exigence for the creation of works of literature as diverse in nature as Hitler's Mein Kampf, Martin Luther King's "Letter from Birmingham Jail," and Stephen M. Joseph's The Me Nobody Knows. Isolation literature, however, can be differentiated from the novel and other literary genres in that its rhetorical quality does not derive from the audience addressed nor from the effect sought but rather from the personal appeals of the individuals who are experiencing isolation. It is a kind of rhetoric of self.

This unique rhetorical quality is readily apparent in the writings of persons undergoing prison confinement. In such a setting, the

individual seeks to achieve a state of well-being despite his realization that he has undergone the absolute loss of personal freedom. His response is rhetorical in that it involves the selection and adoption of a strategic approach to his environment, a response specifically designed to manipulate his experience. Dominant features of this response pattern are manifested in particular works of four prison rhetors: George Jackson, Eldridge Cleaver, Jean Genet, and Viktor Frankl. It is the purpose of this study to focus on these isolated selves, to examine the options available to them as they sought to regain control of their lives, and to analyze the strategies each chose in order to minimize or mitigate the effect of isolation.

The situation of isolation is a constant environment. Whether isolation is defined by a prison experience or personal alienation, the situation cannot be changed solely by the resources of the individual. A characteristic of the rhetoric of isolation is that any consequence of the appeals employed must be a change in the individual and how he perceives his experience. By himself, he is powerless against the torment of his situation. The appeal or strategy is designed accordingly; its true benefit will come only if it brings a change in the individual's view of his own predicament. Isolation rhetoric has the dual role not only of appealing for a change in self but for a change in environment, and that appeal is meant to bring a change in the individual. It is, more often than not, self-directed rather than intended to affect others. The unique quality of prison experience is that it presents a constant environment which demands change of the individual. The response to this demand in a symbolic, stylized manner constitutes the rhetoric of isolation.

Isolation presents virtually the same scene to all entering prison. This scene is characterized by three traumatic reversals in the status of the self: a loss of personal power; the separation of the individual from his previous social role; and the destruction of his identity. Every individual maintains a personal power to persuade his environment in order to survive both physically and mentally. The organization of the prison at once eliminates this persuasive power. The resources of the individual which previously defined his success are removed. The social role of the individual, his success and reinforcement in that role, automatically cease. These consequences define the prisoner's isolation. By contrast, it is through personal resources and social participation that a person derives his identity in society. The effect of isolation can be reduced fundamentally to the destruction of that identity. Not only does this occur under the regimen of isolation, but prison has a symbolic, ritualistic "kill" as the prisoner is reduced to a number, and the last stronghold of his identity, his name, is removed. At this point the prisoner is in a state of personal limbo. He is physically isolated from society and his past self; mentally he retreats from the new reality which is defined by the prison. (See fig. 1)

In society, the individual gains social reinforcement of his identity by the various communications and contacts of daily life. When these are removed from his life, his self becomes an isolated unit. The survival of the self depends on his ability to regain or recreate social acceptance. The prisoner's strategy to overcome this unfulfilled need may come in three fashions: the removal of his social needs, the development of alternative social organizations within the prison, or the development of

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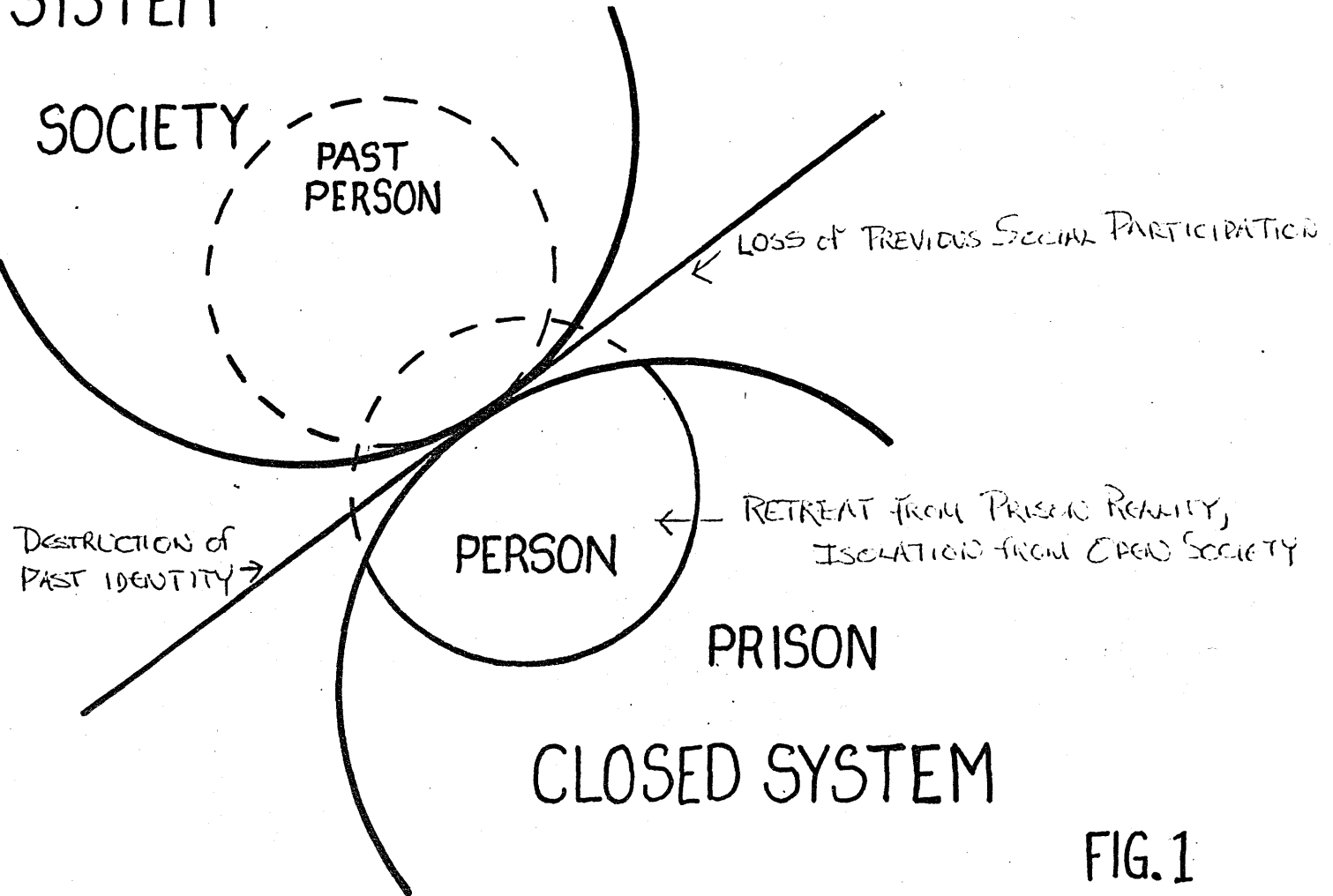


FIG. 1



strong identification with a movement. The common goal of such movements provides a social collectivity among its adherents and gives them the sense of persuasive power through the illusion of changing some existing condition. The strategies of self-preservation and of developing alternative social resources serve to reinstate or replace the prisoner's lost identity.

The choice of strategy and when it is made thus becomes crucial to our understanding of isolation rhetoric. The choice indicates the time of personal change, when the past identity had not been successful and the individual seeks a new approach to his environment. In the cases of Jackson, Cleaver, Genet, the Frankl, their choices are all strategic in that they are disclosing (to themselves and ultimately to society) their state of mind, their success in prison and the degree of self-change that they have undergone. When the prisoner chooses to change himself, he does so under consideration of all that has happened to him and within him. His choice reveals that information to us. Choices have therefore become the focus of analysis in this study.

In chapter two the cases of George Jackson and Eldridge Cleaver will be examined with their choices becoming the crucial point of the exposition. The similarity of their experience and its product, their rhetoric, will be used to develop the first stage of a model of isolation rhetoric. In chapter three, the cases of Jean Genet and Viktor Frankl serve to fill out and complete this model. Their prison experiences will also add new dimensions to the rhetoric of isolation, for the situations and responses of these two authors are much different from those of Jackson and Cleaver. Yet, as shall be seen, the rhetoric that is generated from their experience is markedly similar. Finally, in chapter four,

the cases of the four authors will serve as an information backdrop to the further development of the model. Based upon what we know of rhetoric and the choices these authors made in isolation, the model will be used to posit some conclusions about isolation, society, rhetoric, and man.

## CHAPTER II

### THE CHOICE OF RHETORICAL ACTION

Isolation has thus far been characterized as presenting as abnormal, destructive environment. To examine further the consequences of this environment, it would be helpful to consider isolation as a rhetorical scene. The response to this scene as it is found in the choices of isolated individuals is a symbolic, strategic response, a response intended to counteract isolation's destructive effect. In two books, The Prison Letters of George Jackson and Eldridge Cleaver's Soul on Ice, can be found the embodiment of this response. Not only are these works rhetorical in themselves, but they provide us with a kind of stylized diary of prison life.

To expose the isolation rhetoric of these authors, we must see their books in two different contexts. Both books contain predominant themes of racial analysis and appeal. These appeals constitute part of the rhetoric of the black movement. However, these appeals are also strategies in another rhetorical design, a rhetoric of self. This stylized rhetoric is emitted from the self in order to affect the self. The function of such a rhetoric is to preserve the individual and his sense of identity. In the absence of communication, the individual's self expression loses its normal "other" orientation and becomes literally a form of self address. To show this process, our examination of the stories of prison

authors will be limited to the choices they make for two reasons:

1) it is in those choices that we can see their rhetoric of self affecting change, and 2) the scene in which the choice is made allows us to examine the role of isolation, which is the exigence of this rhetoric of self.

The examination of the rhetorical response as it is manifested in personal choice also provides the context to perceive a pattern to the authors' behavior. In this chapter, key features from the experiences of Jackson and Cleaver will be used to establish a pattern of the isolated person's response. Considering the dimensions of this pattern in visual form elaborates for us a model to be used for further analysis in chapter three.

George Jackson

Early in his book, Jackson gives us some advice for studying isolation.

For a real understanding of the failure of prison policies, it is senseless to continue to study the criminal . . . . To determine how men behave once they enter prison it is of first importance to know that prison. Men are brutalized by their environment - not the reverse. (p. 29)

As Jackson tells the story of his former life from prison, he is describing a person who has long been brutalized by his environment. His early life as a poor, young black in a white dominated society was a scene of alienation for him in much the same way that prison became his isolation. His response to the white racist society he perceived was criminality. When he was eighteen years old, he was sentenced from one year to life for robbing a gasoline station. He was to spend the next eleven years in prison, over eight of them in solitary confinement. A five-by-eight-foot cell defined his reality for those eight years, yet he refused to submit to the prison authority. He fought his own destruction with his indomitable will, his ideals, and his only source of communication; the letter. After ten years of confinement, when he was twenty-eight years old, he was charged with the murder of a guard in Soledad Prison. Two days before his trial began, he was shot in an escape attempt. His long struggle with the prison system, his book of published letters, and the sense in which he died a free man made the infamous "Soledad Brother" a hero of the black cause.

When Jackson entered prison, he had been desperately avoiding capture by the police. The time spent in running and hiding had given him the chance to prepare himself for what happened. "I was prepared for

prison, it required only minor psychic adjustments." (p. 9) He soon learned that any sort of true preparation was impossible for an environment such as prison. "The very first time it was like dying. Just to exist at all in the cage calls for some heavy psychic readjustments." (p. 18) Within these realizations, Jackson is describing three aspects of prison isolation: 1) that isolation has a progressive effect; 2) that his life became visible to him in terms of death; and 3) that isolation demands a change, a "psychic readjustment."

Jackson's response to isolation came in the form of those readjustments. He approached them strategically with the goal of preserving himself. He is talking about the changes in his mental and communicative perspective that became necessary upon confinement. As a veteran of prison, Jackson notes again the continual effect of prison, and the fact that his strategic self changes did not alter that scene: "I never adjusted. I haven't adjusted even yet, with half my life already spent in prison. I can't truthfully say prison is any less painful now than during that first experience." (p. 19) Perhaps Jackson's adjustments had allowed him to see himself in different terms, but the fact of his reality had not altered. Isolation demands that the individual change, but he is powerless to change that environment.

Given the constant scene and progressive role of isolation, the choices that Jackson made over the time of his confinement outline three strategic responses. At the beginning he preserved his sense of self by changing his self-image and becoming an indestructible persona. When his needs remained unfulfilled, he found identity and meaning in the black movement. Acclimated to isolation, yet never having conquered it, he

sought an identification with a member of free society, hoping vicariously to share in that freedom.

The indestructible persona which became Jackson's first major strategic response is the product of purposeful self-alteration. Jackson engages in relabelling his reality such that isolation, or the "inside" can be perceived as freedom within his new attitude. To accomplish this, he had to become the type of person he saw as operating freely in the prison environment. This image is dictated by the requirements of isolation, his personality, and his feelings as he reacted to his new reality. Together, these factors constitute the immediate scene to which he must react. We have already seen that his immediate feeling was one of dying. The symbolic death of the prisoner's social identity has already been described. Jackson chose to complete this scene of death by removing those aspects of himself which made him weak in his brutal environment. What we witness is the death of his ego.

I have made some giant steps toward acquiring the things that I will personally need if I am to be successful in my plans; a certain quality of character needed to perform the thing I have in mind. I have completely repressed all emotion; have learned to see myself in perspective, in true relationship with other men and the world - when a man does something or possesses something that is complementary to his character, it is impossible for him to hide this thing, keep from telling it to those he wished to repress; this is natural egoism, the need for attention and flattery asserting itself. I have quietly removed this need; neglect and loneliness have no effect on me anymore. I feel no pain of mind or body, and the harder it gets, the better I like it. I must rid myself of all sentiment and remove all possibility of love. (p.42)

The 'quality of character' that Jackson desired was his image of a free person. To be free from depression and personal loss was his goal. He had to remove those

human features which could be used by the prison authority, or by his own desperation, to harm him. He was becoming in his mind what constituted for him a free agent.

What if a person was so oriented that the loss of no material thing could cause him mental disorganization? This is the free agent. He is nameless, faceless, emotionless, loveless. He is without habit, weakness of the flesh. He travels light and only in the company of those who like himself prize self determination above baseball and beer. (p. 120)

Jackson engaged in a struggle with his rhetorical scene for control over himself. Be becoming the type of person he describes, he sought to preserve himself, persuade himself and gain the power to define his own reality. This is the function of his rhetoric of self. Implicit in his self changes is the goal of survival. By pursuing this response, he overcame isolation by becoming the "rhetorical hero."<sup>1</sup>

Jackson strategically made himself into the image of the free agent. What he gained from this perspective was a more rugged, hopefully indestructible identity. He is coping with isolation and the loss of his identity; he is overcoming the destructive scene which he has irrevocably entered. Jackson sees the power to do so as being reduced to two essential needs: strength and control.

Strength comes from knowledge, knowing who you are, where you want to go, what you want, knowing and accepting that you are alone in the world. Strength

---

<sup>1</sup>The Rhetorical Hero, by William Righter, is a critical essay of the literary work of Andre Malraux. In this essay, Righter describes Malraux's characters as isolated persona expressing themselves and choosing their own personality through 'the art of choice.' This characterization is very similar to the prisoner's self image as he reacts to isolation. Jackson's case would appear to validate Malraux's characters rather than the reverse, for Jackson is a very real person acting out a very real life inside a very real prison.



is being able to control yourself and your total environment - yourself first, however, take care of yourself. (p. 152)

Jackson is responding with his new persona to the dual scene of isolation and death. He derived a new identity from this persona, an identity which coped with the death of his past identity, and one which gave him the perspective to deal with the realization that he would inevitably die in isolation.

Jackson has solved, or at least attempted to solve the problem of identity in isolation. Yet he still had not succeeded in establishing any means of fulfilling his social needs. His claims that he removed these needs do not remain consistent with his actions. The fact of his solitary confinement would seem to preclude any strategy to obtain social participation. Yet, the need was still there. "We're social animals, we need others of our general kind about us to feel secure. Few men would enjoy total isolation." (p. 186) When Jackson considered his identity, his situation and why he is there, one thing stood out in his mind: his blackness. The racism he saw as inherent in the prison system only served to remind him that he was a black in a white world. In order to derive meaning in isolation, Jackson developed a strong identification with the black movement. He still maintained the emotionless, strategic free agent which he created. To give that identity meaning, however, he heralded its blackness. "Though I owe allegiance to no one other than myself, I clearly understand that my future rests with the black people of the world." (p. 42) In the face of his death in isolation, Jackson needed a sense of value and meaning to continue his struggle. This came in aligning his goals, his future,

and his free agent image with the cause of the black movement.

Only after you understand this can you go on to make the necessary alterations that will bring some purpose and value to your life; you must gain some control! . . . I don't need god, religion, belief, etc. I need control over the determining factors relating to the forwarding of our interests. (p. 53)

Previously Jackson had strategically removed all care for anything but his own survival. Now he sees that survival as invested totally in the survival and success of his race. This marks a progression; a progression in the extent of his isolation, and the concurrent development of his strategic response. Although Jackson states that he does not need god, religion or belief, his identification with the black movement provided him with the same sense of meaning that those "higher cause" strategies offer.

The strategy of adopting a higher cause or mass movement is not an uncommon one for prisoners. Jackson's personal flight to the black ideals is shared by most blacks who are imprisoned.

There are some blacks here that consider themselves criminals - but not many. Believe me, my friend, with the time and incentive that these brothers have to read, study and think, you will find no class or category more aware, more embittered, desperate or dedicated to the ultimate remedy, revolution. They live like there was no tomorrow. And for most of them, there isn't. Somewhere along the line they sensed this. (p. 36)

From these words, two ideas are suggested: 1) that prisoners resist accepting the label of "criminal," and that they are able to do so because they are dedicated to the common goal of revolution, and 2) this is in response to the realization that for them, there is no tomorrow. This reemphasizes the image of death as a persuasive element in the scene of isolation.

The strong identification Jackson and other prisoners develop

with the black movement is useful to them in two ways: it established an alternative source of persuasive power and gives them the ability to transcend their immediate reality. The black movement, or any cause which generates belief, creates a collective identity among its followers. Included in this identity are the features of a common purpose and a substitute for the personal power lost. Change is the goal of the movement and change is the goal of the isolated. When Jackson aligns his future with the future of his people, he strategically invests himself in an identity and purpose larger than himself.

Identity, meaning, social participation, and a source of power other than the authority are the remedies of the prisoner who has abandoned himself. Together they form a self image and an alternate reality which allow the prisoner to transcend isolation and inevitable death. Powerless to control anything but his five by eight foot cell and its contents, Jackson and his ideals merged. Their future became his own and the reality they provided is one where Jackson operated in freedom.

As an individual, I don't worry about my future. I know my ideals will prevail, so I don't worry about that. They can't harm me, because the reality is I have nothing to lose but my chains. (p. 139)

Transcendence is an implicit feature of all prison strategies. The strategy of developing into the free agent image allowed Jackson to deal with the authority, the environment and his mental disorientation. It also allowed him to transcend his reality and his feelings of death. It did so by allowing him to utilize his remaining resources of personal persuasion. At this further point in isolation, Jackson is tapping an alternate source of persuasive power. This distinguishes a major change in his strategic response and evidences the continual oppression of isolation. From this point he progresses farther into isolation and

becomes more dependent on alternate sources of power.

The black movement and his level of involvement with it did not solve Jackson's personal needs. The major effect was the transcendence it offered. The next strategy that he adopted was granted by its availability. Jackson's strategies of finding personal freedom in isolation had failed. He had come to see his final freedom as death in isolation. When he was visited by a female lawyer who brought hope for reentering society, his strategy changed. In reality, Jackson was still isolated. But this contact with outside society reoriented his vision of freedom. He now would seek freedom in an identification with a person in society. The strategy he uses is one of "love."

The last portion of Jackson's book is a collection of love letters written to three women, among them Angela Davis. These letters were Jackson's attempt to form a relationship with free society through the lives of persons with choice. Here, society has once again become his source of freedom through the use of the love letter as a rhetorical medium. The rhetorical quality of these communications is apparent because of the sense in which they are called "love letters." Not all of these letters, which Jackson himself calls love letters, are written with the intention of communicating with or persuading a lover, the intention we might expect of a love letter. Rather, they are written with the purpose of self expression, forming sources of communication, finding meaning in personal relationships, and of communicating to society the tragedies of prison and racial oppression; tragedies which Jackson saw in his life as one and the same.

Jackson's rhetorical strategy of love represents a distinct choice in his manner of dealing with isolation. The fact of this choice

immediately suggests three developments: 1) it represents a reversal of his loveless, emotionless character; 2) it shows the desire for communication and understanding with both individuals and society; and 3) his "love" is not directed to any specific individual exclusively, it emanates from his total perspective. In surviving ten years of isolation, Jackson sought to accept prison as freedom. At this stage, society, other people, and social contact were his source of freedom. This shift of perspective will become crucial when we examine Jackson's choices in terms of a model. It is important to note that Jackson himself was aware of this change and that he purposefully initiated it as a response to a further progression of his isolation. He writes to Angela Davis:

I think of you all the time. I've been thinking about women a lot lately. Is there anything sentimental or wrong with that? There couldn't be. It's never bothered me too much before, the sex thing. I would do my exercises and the hundreds of katas, stay busy with something. . . this ten years really has gone pretty quickly. It has destroyed me as a person, a human being that is, but it was sudden, it was a sudden death, it seems like ten days rather than ten years. (p. 213)

The crucial distinction that Jackson made was that his death as a person had been completed. With his love letters, he again sought life. Because he was still isolated to the scene of his death, the only life he found was in a vicarious sharing with persons in society.

Jackson learned to expect death in isolation as a means of dealing with rhetorical scene. For him death became his image of ultimate freedom. He was right in that expectation, for he was shot while attempting to escape from San Quentin Prison. His environment was indeed trying to kill him. Perhaps his choice to escape indicates that society was his only true source of freedom while alive. After ten years of constant adapting and struggling, he had found no true freedom in isolation.

### Eldridge Cleaver

Eldridge Cleaver began serving his first prison term when he was eighteen years old for possession of marijuana. He entered prison in 1954, a year which became significant to him for many reasons. The Supreme Court had just outlawed segregation; Cleaver was eighteen, black, and going to jail. It is at this time that Cleaver's racial consciousness began to surface. His pursuit of that consciousness during a second prison term set him on a search for identity which, with Cleaver's studies and social observation, led him to a new understanding of the black man in white America. His book, Soul on Ice, is the reflection of that understanding. The appeal of his analysis has influenced not only the direction of the black movement in America, but our entire social consciousness. Cleaver's book, written from prison, also marks a significant change in his life. His desire to communicate with and influence society, and the overwhelming needs of an isolated man were part of the reason for his writing, only one of Cleaver's many rhetorical actions.

Cleaver is writing during his second prison experience. During his years in jail, he was confined in Folsom, Soledad and San Quentin prisons. He spent time in both solitary confinement and on Honor blocks in these prisons. Cleaver's story, like Jackson's, is one of a man brutalized by prison. Cleaver left prison the first time with a new perspective on life, but it was not one of a reformed marijuana smoker. He emerged from prison with a new set of goals and a new personality to accomplish them. Like Jackson's first reaction to prison, Cleaver was concerned with himself as an individual with the power to choose and act. The new attitude was one where rhetorical action becomes the medium of Cleaver's self preservation.

I decided that the only safe thing for me to do was go for myself. It became clear that it was possible for me to take the initiative: instead of simply reacting I could act. I could unilaterally - whether anyone agreed with me or not - repudiate all allegiances, morals, values - even while continuing to exist with this society. My mind would be free and no power in the universe could force me to accept something if I didn't want to. But I would take my own sweet time. That, too, was a part of my new freedom. (p. 19)

'Like Jackson,' this ability to choose and act delivered the sense of identity that prison wished to kill. Cleaver, too, became "The Rhetorical Hero."

Cleaver's attitude did not stop with this realization of personal power. Like Jackson's free agent, Cleaver's perspective developed into a complete persona. After he left prison, his goal was to rape white women, actions for which he would reenter prison. He approached his goal in a strategic, organized manner by practising rape on black women in the ghetto and working up to the actions that his 'intellectual criminality' deemed appropriate. His motives were not sexual, they were rhetorical.

Somehow I arrived at the conclusion that, as a matter of principle, it was of paramount importance for me to have an antagonistic, ruthless attitude toward white women. The term 'outlaw' appealed to me at the time my parole date was drawing near; I considered myself to be mentally free. I was an outlaw. I had stepped outside the white man's law, which I repudiated with scorn and self-satisfaction. I became a law unto myself-my own legislature, my own supreme court, my own executive. (p. 25)

The 'outlaw' gave Cleaver two advantages: the satisfaction of acting against his oppressor and a symbolic, mental freedom. The fulfillment of this persona was a strategy in his rhetoric of self. Cleaver was wrong

about one thing, however. The outlaw could not continue to exist within this society. He went back to prison on a sentence for rape.

The beginning of Cleaver's second prison term became a time of drastic self-reevaluation. He had to admit that he was wrong, yet he could not accept the torment of the prison system. Once again his mental freedom, his identity and his life were taken from him. He reencountered the scenes of death and isolation that prison offers, once again he was powerless in his environment.

I was very familiar with the Eldridge who came to prison, but that Eldridge no longer exists. And the one I am now is in some ways a stranger to me. You may find this difficult to understand but it is very easy for one in prison to lose his sense of self. And if he has been undergoing all kinds of extreme, involved and unregulated changes, then he ends up not knowing who he is. (p. 28)

In the position of not possessing a viable identity, Cleaver is once again thrown into the scene where he must construct an identity, one based upon rhetorical action. His long involvement with the Muslim religion provided part of his new self. The rise of Malcolm X in that movement gave Cleaver a starting place. As a proponent of Malcolm's teachings, Cleaver once again was engaging in rhetorical activity. This, too, was soon to be taken from him with the assassination of Malcolm X.

Cleaver's religious and racial involvement with the Muslim faith were strategies in the same sense as the outlaw. As the outlaw, he sought power from his ability to act. In prison, his power comes from the social collectivity of his religion and faith. The unity of such a movement created by the common situation and goals of his fellow prisoners, formed a body of people engaged in similar symbolic actions ranging from preaching a cause to the special double handshake of the followers of Muhammad.



These gestures, practised intensely and frequently became a rhetoric of isolation for blacks in prison. Cleaver, particularly after the death of Malcolm X, still had not fulfilled his need for rhetorical actions. He wrote:

This is why I started to write, to save myself. I had to find out who I am and what I want to be, what type of man I should be, and what I could do to become the best of which I was capable. (p. 27)

Cleaver reacted to the lack of identity, success and purpose in his life. He responded with a rhetorical strategy. By aligning himself with the common identity of the black race, his rhetoric of self became the rhetoric of the black movement. The result was perhaps the most original and stimulating analysis of the racial situation in America ever written.

Cleaver's progression into isolation has thus far been analogous to Jackson's. The strategies of developing an indestructible persona and adopting a racial identity are seen in both cases. Like many prisoners, they both sought writing as rhetorical behavior. Cleaver's final strategy like Jackson's, was one of developing a relationship with a person in free society. His medium was also the love letter. Cleaver's strategy was developed upon the available contact from outside society, which came in the form of a visit by a white, female lawyer named Beverly Axlerod. Along with her very real presence, she brought hope for parole. Until this time, Cleaver had sought freedom and relief within prison. He had learned to use the alternate organization of the Muslim religion as a source of transcendence and persuasion. He had even learned to like his solitary cell and its impenetrable door. Now, he sought freedom from society, through writing to influence it, and by sharing love with one of its members. Cleaver had been in prison over eight years when Miss Axlerod entered his

life. Despite his writing, his religion and his rhetoric, this new aspect of his environment spurred him to reveal what nine years in prison had done to him, and to write her of his strategic love.

You have tossed me a lifeline. If you only knew how I'd been drowning, how I'd considered that I'd gone down for the last time long ago, how I kept thrashing around in the water simply because I still felt the impulse to fight back and the tug of a distant shore, how I sat in rage that night with the polysyllabic burden of your name pounding on my brain - it was an equation constructed in delerium, and it was right. (p. 134)

Cleaver's equation was the strategy he pursued by writing love letters to this woman; a white woman whom he previously have scorned or raped.

Although Cleaver's letters were of a more true sense 'love letters' than were Jackson's, the strategic value of the actions was the same. After long years of isolation, neither man had adapted to progressive isolation and the continual death of their persons. Like the recipients of Jackson's love, Beverly Axlerod became Cleaver's 'social operant', and through her freedom Cleaver sought freedom and new life.

But I had always had a strong sense of myself and in the last few years I felt I was losing my identity. There was a deadness on my body that eluded me, as though I could not locate its sight. Now I know what it was. And since encountering you, I feel life strength flowing back into that spot. (p. 135)

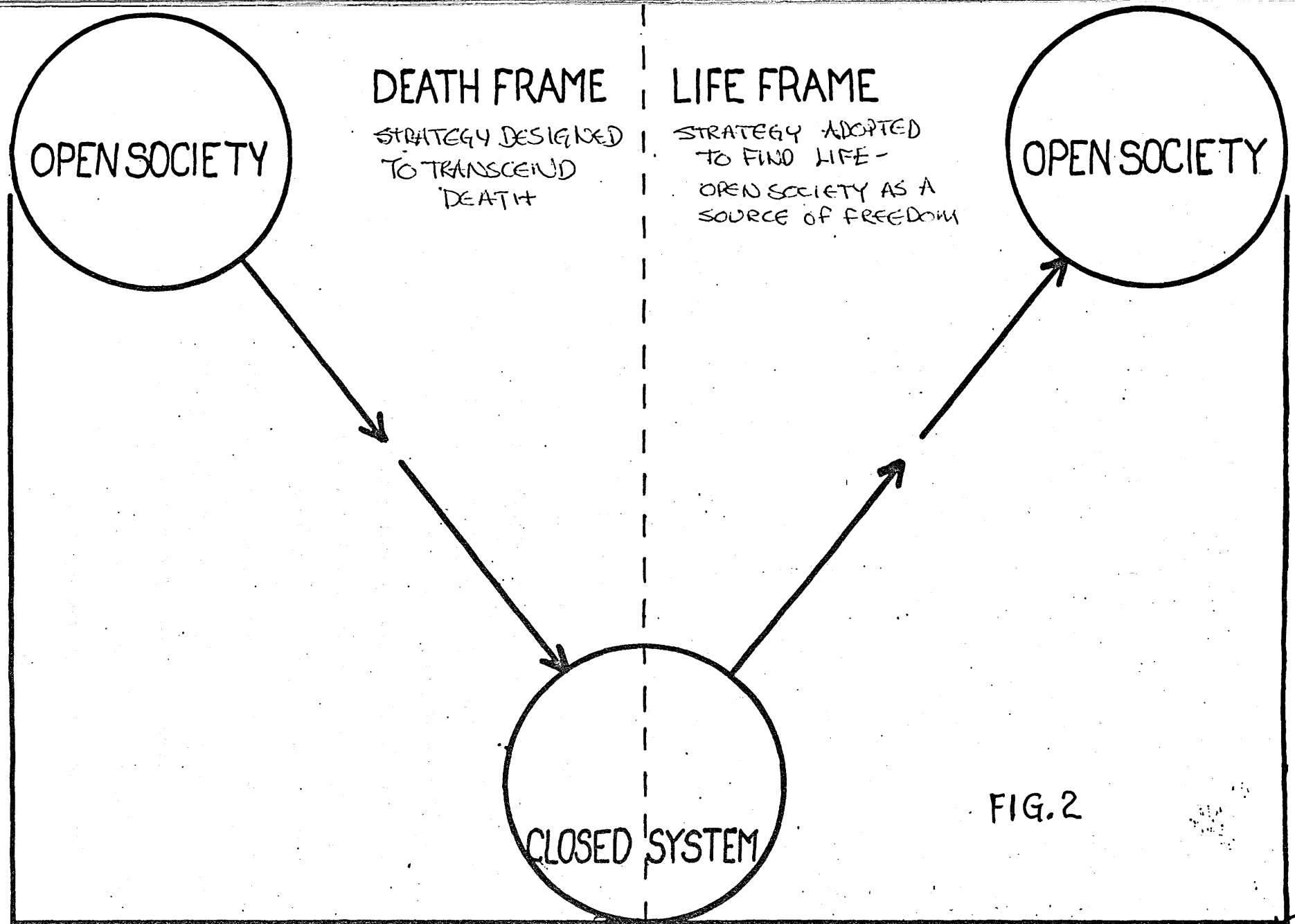
Just as in Jackson's case, Cleaver's strategy of love came when he had been isolated so long, freedom in society had replaced death as the image of ultimate freedom. Cleaver hoped and perhaps expected to reenter society through parole. Hinged upon contact from outside society, the strategies of finding freedom in isolation fall apart. In this state of total self abandon, the power of love becomes the source of persuasion for the isolated.

It is the remarkable similarity in the experiences of George Jackson and Eldridge Cleaver, the choices they made and the strategies they utilized during confinement which suggests a pattern in the response of individuals to isolation. By examining more closely the needs of the isolated and the motives for their behavior, some definitions and categories for that behavior can be made.

### Conclusions: Toward a Model of Isolation Rhetoric

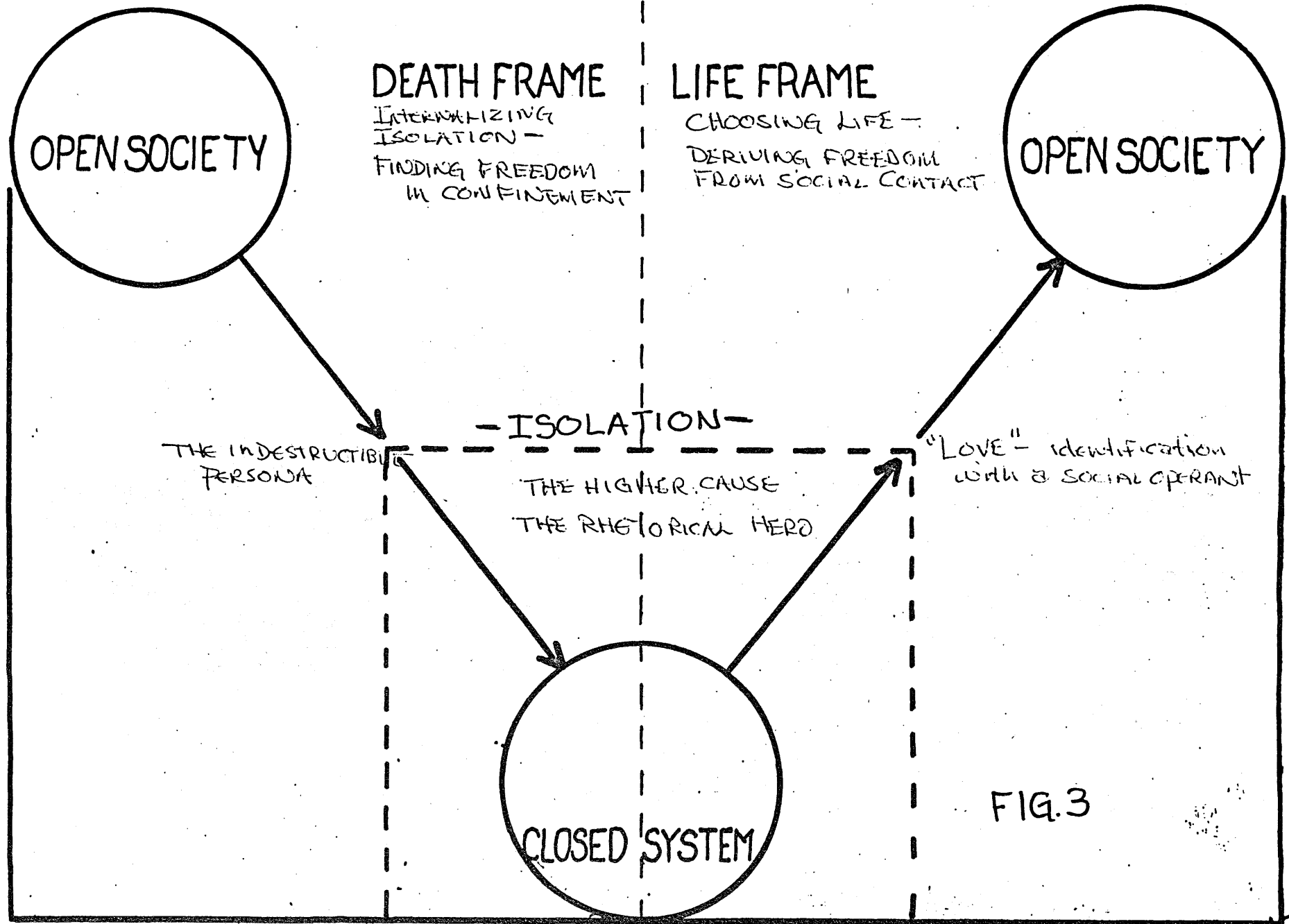
The essential similarities found in the stories of George Jackson and Eldridge Cleaver suggest that there is a pattern to the individual's reaction to isolation. While their experiences and strategic responses are not exhaustive of the rhetoric of isolation, a consideration of those primary features of their stories establishes categories of the responses we can expect in further analyses. The basic components of this pattern are threefold: 1) that certain strategies are adopted under consideration of death, which we will call 'The Death Frame;' 2) that in their later years in prison there was a reversal of attitude causing the prisoners to seek a sense of freedom from a relationship to society, which we will call 'The Life Frame;' and 3) that isolation has a progressive quality which involves the individual in a movement and interaction between these two "frames." This relationship can be characterized visually. (See fig. 2)

In the 'Death Frames' of Jackson and Cleaver, their concern with their emotional death, their vision of death as ultimate freedom from their circumstance, and their stark awareness of inevitable death, are in direct relationship with a process of internalizing the prison environment. The scene of this environment becomes visible to them in terms of death, and they react to the reality that those perceptions present. Their primary reaction is the strategy of developing the "indestructable persona." The value of this strategy is to combat the "death" scene by becoming a person who cannot be affected by anything except death, and for him death only offers freedom. In this perspective, freedom can be found in isolation and its accompanying death sensation.



The 'Life Frame' is characterized by the strategy of "love." The strategy is to gain a vicarious freedom from society through a social operant. This represents a reversal from the death frame not only in the source of expected freedom, but also in the value of that freedom. While, in the 'Death Frame', the strategy of the indestructible persona is designed to combat the reality of dying in isolation, the strategy in the frame of life must combat the reality of living in isolation and the torment which that entails. Also, diametrically opposed to the death frame is the strategy of love. The indestructible persona is loveless and has no emotion, the "lover", which Jackson and Cleaver ultimately become, thrives on love and emotion. This paradox is illustrated dramatically by the stories of both men. Cleaver is in prison because he hated and therefore raped white women. After almost ten years of prison he stayed alive by loving a white woman.

The higher cause strategy or, in these cases, the racial identity, represents a state of adaptation to isolation, and is not inconsistent with strategies found in either frame. Both authors maintain their racial identity throughout their prison experience. Their level of involvement and the value they derive from their racial consciousness does, however, represent a status in their movement through an isolated life. In both the stories of their lives and in the organization of their books, the racial involvement represents a middle ground between their strategies of death and life. Death represents the process of adapting to prison, the higher cause represents a state of adaptation to prison, and Life represents the reality that one cannot fully adapt to, nor find a true freedom in, prison: that it must come from social contact. The relationship as thus described can also be conceptualized within the visual framework. (see figs. 3-5)



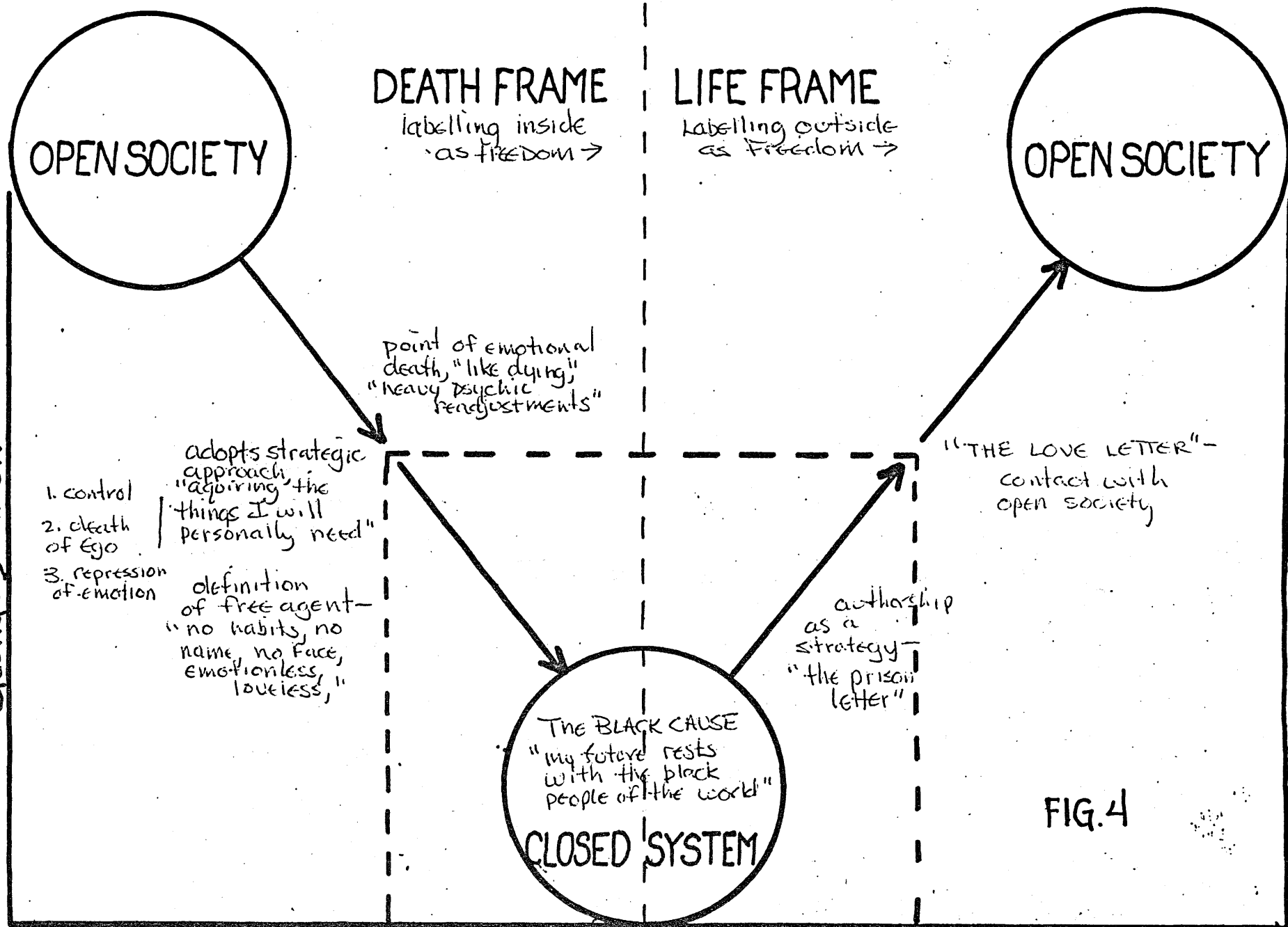
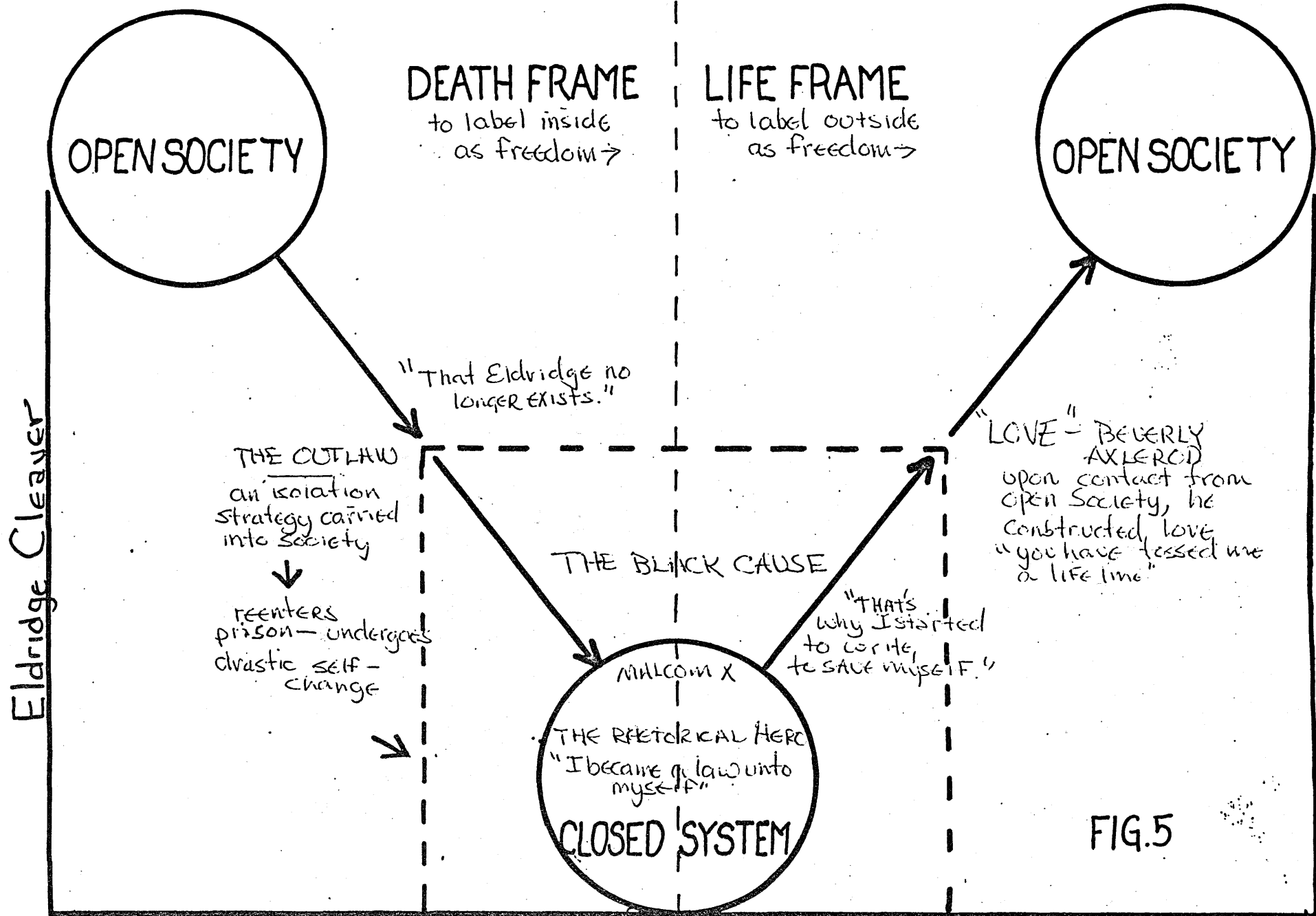


FIG. 4





### CHAPTER III

#### THE CHOICE OF RHETORICAL SELFHOOD

The cases of George Jackson and Eldridge Cleaver have given us a perspective on the rhetoric of isolation. Their books are an indication of the stylized response to isolation which has become the 'genre' of prison writings. The analysis of their stories exclusively, however, creates several limitations to our assessment of isolation's effects. Both authors became concerned with and compelled to write about their lives, their blackness, the politics of the American penal system and the status of the black race in America. Their writings about these concerns do not exhaust the rhetoric of isolation, they are only part of the strategic response made by those two men. In this chapter, basic information which Jackson and Cleaver have provided will be used to examine two very different cases of isolation: those of Jean Genet and Viktor Frankl.

Genet takes our present understanding beyond the behavioral-political level observed in Jackson and Cleaver's works. Genet gives us an example of a complete rhetoric of self: a rhetoric designed from a life of total isolation, made beautiful by the poetics of his self. Frankl takes us beyond this symbolic level of observation to his own theological-psychological interpretation of isolation behavior, a perspective which became a prescriptive theory for understanding human problems. Together, these two cases will bring new dimensions to the scope of a rhetoric of isolation. They also assist in filling out the visual conceptualization constructed so far.

### Jean Genet

Genet speaks as the authority on isolation, and perhaps correctly so. His entire life was spent in state institutions. At the age of ten, he entered a boys reformatory in France. He spent the next thirty years in a number of prisons and the notorious penal colonies. Headed for an irrevocable life sentence for his tenth theft conviction, Genet was pardoned by the French government at the intervention of France's most successful writers.

Genet is a poet, his story is the unfolding of his private reality through the visions of his imagination. The Miracle of the Rose, used for this study, is part of a four volume set of autobiographical novels. No attempt is made to analyze Genet from an objective statement about his reality, for no roadmaps can be drawn through his world of psychic imagination. With his own understanding of the terms of his life and isolation, however, a picture of the world of a prison is made as Genet describes what happened to him and the prisoners with whom he shared his journey.

Genet presents himself as an example of one who has internalized the prison environment. He wrote:

The objects here in jail have been worn out by my eyes and are now sickly pale. They no longer mean prison to me, since the prison is inside me, composed of the cells of my tissues. (p. 32)

This is the same process encountered by the two previous authors. Genet, too, sees this process as inextricably linked to death.

And it grieved me to discover this new aspect of the world and of prison at a time when I was beginning to realize that prison was indeed the closed area, the confined; measured universe in which I ought to live permanently. It is the universe for which I am meant. It is meant for me. . . I feel so much a part of this world, it horrifies me to know that I am excluded from the others, yours, just when I was attaining the qualities by means of which one can live in it. I am therefore dead. (p. 33)

Genet has passed beyond the dying sensations experience by the previous authors. By accepting, internalizing and living isolation, he is dead.

Genet's reaction to the world of prison, a world which has now become him, is characteristically similar to the outlaw or the free agent. Genet sees himself and his fellow prisoners reacting to their symbolic deaths strategically. They construct their own characters so as to become the indestructible persona.

It seems to you impossible that I dare ascribe a petty thief the act of building his life minute by minute, witnessing its construction, which is also a progressive destruction . . . Harcamone was a former colonist of Mettray who had built his life there minute by minute, one might almost say stone by stone, as had all the others in order to bring some completion the fortress most insensitive to men's blows. (p. 61)

The strategy of constructing an alternate identity appeared in the stories of Jackson and Cleaver as a function to restore personal power. Genet spoke of this power, and affirms that it indeed is a product of an isolated self.

I shall be able to see him as he is, a pale, lively hoodlum, unless the fact of remaining solitary, alone with himself, unnamable and unnamed, charges him with even more power. (p. 36)

Genet is familiar with the effects of prison, and sensitive to the changes of his fellow prisoners.

In Genet's own life, he many times exemplified this act of changing character to derive power. During his early years in prison he became attracted to the "crasher" (thief). Genet ascribes to this image the quality of the "warrior." Genet's involvement with this image is quite similar to Cleaver's construction of the outlaw; both in the personification of the character and the function it served them. Genet writes:

And I was not completely at ease unless I could completely take his place, take on his qualities, his virtues; when I was he . . . I wanted to be myself, and I was myself when I became a crasher. But the crasher takes risks in the practice of his trade. His ruses are the ruses of a warrior and not of a sharper. (Speaking of his jimmy, a thief's tool) I slept beside it, for a warrior sleeps armed. (p. 28)

Becoming a crasher was a strategy, a strategy of fulfillment. The persona of the crasher, the warrior, whose divine and rhetorical role Genet was to play in life, delivered a sense of identity and freedom to him. "And it was not until much later, after all those stages, that I decided to be a thief . . . this happened slowly. I went to theft as to a liberation, to the light." (p. 130) Genet's change into the image of the crasher illuminates the indestructible persona strategy. It provided him with a sense of being himself, personal power, and "liberation." Within his role of active adaptation to prison, Genet found freedom in the act of changing his attitude.

. . . But the aim of this book is only to relate the experience of freeing myself from a state of painful torpor, from a low, shameful life taken up with prostitution and begging and under the sway of the glamour and charm of the criminal world. I freed myself by and for a prouder attitude. (p. 29)

Genet not only reinforces the general observation of persona development, but he suggests that it is not uncommon for prisoner's identities to have a temporary basis. The prisoner must witness his life's

"construction, which is also a progressive destruction." The character of the isolated is in a constant process of change, building a personality and seeing it destroyed.

Genet has described in general terms the tendency of prisoners to change themselves and adopt protective persona. He has placed Jackson and Cleaver's reactions within a larger perspective of personal strategy. Genet also notes the further progression of isolation in the lives and thoughts of his fellow prisoners. He describes the full rhetorical impact of the prison experience, that isolation has a rhetorical moment within the prisoner's life when it is totally absorbed.

But within the prison, at its very heart, are solitary confinement and the disciplinary cell from which one emerges purified . . . The origin - the roots - of the great social movements cannot possibly lie in goodness, nor can they be accounted for or by any reasons which are openly avowable, Religions, the Frankish and French royalty, the free masonaries, the Holy Empire, the Church, national Socialism, the branches could have been nourished only in the depths. A man must dream a long time in order to act with grandeur, and dreaming is nourished only in darkness . . . Prisons are places where such reveries take shape. Prisons and their inmates have too real an existence not to have a profound effect on people who remain free. (p. 37)

For some prisoners, the rhetorical hero of self evolves into the rhetorical hero of society. Genet cites Adolph Hitler as one example.

Dreams are peopled with characters, animals, plants, objects, which are symbols. Each is potent, and then when the one who occasioned it substitutes for the symbol, he benefits from this mysterious power. The potency of the sign is the potency of the dream, and it was likewise in the realm of the dream that national socialism went to search, thanks to an explorer of darkness, for the Swastika. (p. 223)

Two ideas are described here: that prisoners (as did Jackson and Cleaver) adopt a higher identity in prison, that they substitute

themselves for a symbol of their ideals; and that this substitution grants a potency, a rhetorical power to the individual.

One outcome of this rhetorical moment that we can observe in all of our selected cases is the authorship of a book. The prison experience, the development into the rhetorical hero and the power of that hero's dream have created the number of prison writings available, and the effect of these writings felt in our society and world. Genet is aware of the strategy of self involved in this process. In the introduction of Jackson's book, he writes:

A book written in prison - or any place of confinement is addressed chiefly perhaps to readers who are not outcasts, who have never been to jail and who will never go there. That is why in some sense such a book proceeds obliquely. (p. 3) . . . at the same time he was living his life (a kind of death or higher life), without his realizing it, by letters and certain notations in his letters, he was also writing his legend, that is, he was giving us, without intending to, a mythical image of himself and of his life - I mean an image transcending his physical person and his ordinary life in order to project himself into glory with the help of a combat weapon (his book) and of a love poem. (p. 7)

Genet, too, has written much from prison. For him his works are also a way of projecting himself out of his life. The symbols of his life and the beauty he sees in his own tragedy become poems also. His world is one totally saturated with his rhetoric of self, of which he is the hero. Genet is the ultimate manipulator of his own environment.

No doubt I can still produce darkness within me and at the landmark of a memory be thrilled myself with stories of my past. I can still reshape or complete them in the tragic mode which transforms each of them into a poem of which I am the hero... This is the luxury I allow myself. In the cell, gestures can be made with extreme slowness... You can stop in the middle of one. You are the master of time and your thinking... You possess your entire cell because you fill its space with your engrossed mind. (p. 183)

Genet has internalized isolation to the extent that his strategy becomes one of total selfhood. He transcends isolation by grasping and holding its very core, becoming the complete master of his mind and reality. He is the hero of his life's poem; that poem is a rhetoric of isolation. Unlike Jackson and Cleaver, Genet does find a satisfactory freedom in prison.

I am carried along in that fall which, cutting by its very speed and vertically all threads that hold me to the world, plunges me into foulness, into dreaming and hell, and finally lands me in a garden of saintliness where roses bloom, roses whose beauty - as I shall know then - is composed of the rims of the petals, their folds, gashes, tips, spots, insect holes, blushes, and even their stems which are mossy with thorns. (p. 237)

Complacent with Genet's acceptance of isolation, then, is his strategy of intellectually absorbing prison and its "foulness." It is relabelled by his dreams and imagination as beauty and freedom. The rhetorical hero which both Jackson and Cleaver assumed became the symbolic manipulator of a higher racial ideal and its alternate social organization, or the "movement." Genet has a higher life which is prison itself. Rather than projecting himself out of its foulness, he transcends it by plunging into its sickness, and therefore into himself.

Genet's adaptive strategies and those of the other prisoners do not end with the intellectual rhetoric of self. They, too, form alternate



social systems under the name of ideals, movements, and heroes. Similar to the double handshake of the Muslim prisoners is the circular march in Genet's colony. Social contact grants them a source of power.

The day was painful, the drill harassing. Yet it brought me peace, thanks to the magical power of the circular march . . . we knew the happiness of being merged in a solemn dance by the unconsciousness in which our heads dangled, and the comforting sense of unity that one feels in all round dances and other group dances . . . We draw this force from the knowledge that we were bound to each other as we marched round and round. We also felt a sense of power, because we were conquered. And our bodies were strong because we each profited from the strength of forty sets of muscles.  
(p. 331)

In the colony's world of total isolation, the prisoners are a complete society. They are all common in that they are all conquered men. The strategies we have found in the 'Life Frame', where freedom is sought from society, will be seen to exist here as their social freedoms must necessarily come from prison society.

In the cases of Jackson and Cleaver, social freedom was found by investing the self in the freedom of a social operant. This is the case for Genet as well, but his social operant must be one who is free within prison society. As Genet is still truly in the 'Death Frame', or the "Kingdom of Darkness," he selects those whom are free in that frame as his social operants, he chooses those who characterize the indestructable persona. Genet's adaptive strategy of homosexuality allows him to actualize his love for his "free agents." To his lovers he also ascribes the image of the warrior, and cherishes their emotionless acceptance of death. Genet sees this exaggeration of personal relationships as being a means for the self to find glory and freedom.

Those who are sentenced to death for life - the 'transportees' - know that the only means of escaping horror is friendship. By abandoning themselves to it, they forget the world, your world. They raise friendship to so high a plane that it is purified and remains alone, isolated from the creatures who fathered it . . . friendship becomes the individual and very sentiment of love which every predestined man discovers (in his own hiding places) for his inner glory. (p. 45)

Genet loves the condemned prisoners, for they are the nearest to the freedom of death.

Genet is active in his own loves. Homosexuality is part of the adaptive process to isolation from the opposite sex. It is an indication of the changes a person will make in his basic character in order to survive in an abnormal environment. Genet also is familiar with the rhetorical love accomplished by Jackson and Cleaver through the love letter. In the rhetorical love of his imagination and writing, Genet identifies with, and becomes absorbed by, the life of the prisoner Harcamone, who is sentenced to death and awaiting execution. Harcamone is truly a free agent in Genet's perspective, he is going to die. He is also the symbol of Genet's essence-isolation - for he is chained to the floor and able to walk only a small circle. In his complete investment in Harcamone, Genet finds a hero of his rhetoric of self, a free operant through whom he can commune in the freedom of the murderer's death.

Merely by the remark he had made about him (Harcamone), Bulkaen had caused me to turn again to the idol from whom his love had turned me. The murderer seemed to me more dazzling, which proves the delicacy of my feeling for Bulkaen. This love did not lure me into a nether region but, on the contrary, lifted me up and brightened my surroundings. I am using the very language with which mystics speak of their gods and mysteries. They arrive, as is said, in sun and lightening. It was thus that the condemned man appeared to my inner gaze. (p. 118)

Genet let himself absorb the rhetorical impact of the murderer's death.

Over the forty days that Harcamone awaited death as a 'transportee,' Genet reacted vicariously to the death scene; Harcamone and himself became one.

I forgot whatever wasn't Harcamone and his flight from the physical world. I ceased to recognize the sounds that announce the trusty's arrival with the bread and soup. Finally, on the fortieth night, I had a revelation: Harcamone's cell appeared within me. (p. 319)

When the guards came to take Harcamone to his execution, Genet had the vision of freedom, "The Miracle of the Rose." Genet visually created the image of Harcamone's chains becoming a rose, . . ."but what would they have said had they learned of his miracles, that the rose means love, friendship, death . . . and silence." (p. 247) Love, friendship and death are the sources of Genet's freedom, as is the vision of the rose. The chains of isolation, for Genet, flower into the rose of freedom.

## Viktor Frankl

Viktor Frankl was one of the many million Jewish people whose life was suddenly torn from them in the German concentration camps of World War II. Frankl is also a psychologist. In the camps he worked as both medical and spiritual doctor to his fellow captives. The conclusions about the nature of man that Frankl made during his confinement experience have been established as a therapeutic approach to human unhappiness in his theory of Logotherapy. Frankl offers us an understanding of isolation on yet another level. His peculiar combination of existential theology and psychological analysis was born in isolation, where Frankl saw his friends reduced to an essential bareness of life, or a kind of death. Frankl's observations about prison life are characterized by his psychological orientation, but what he tells us about life in the concentration camp is reinforcing of the general conclusions we have reached thus far. His approach presents a new dimension to the rhetoric of isolation.

Frankl entered confinement from a presumably successful practice. His wife and home were separated from him, he did not even know if she was alive. When Frankl was inducted into the concentration camp, his immediate strategy was to "kill" his past self. He noted, "I saw the plain truth and did what marked the culminating point of the first phase of my psychological reaction, I struck out my whole former life." (p. 21) Frankl, like the other prisoners, is an initiate to the death frame. "The prisoner passed from the first to the second phase: the phase of relative apathy, in which he achieved a kind of emotional death." (p. 31) Frankl saw the obvious death of his identity approaching. He reacts by

removing that self from him. He witnesses the death of those around him, both in the literal sense and in the sense of their emotional deaths. The death scene is completed for those prisoners very quickly. Because of the abject desolation of their circumstance, death becomes immediately visible to them as freedom.

The prisoner of Auschwitz, in the first phase of shock, did not fear death. Even the gas chambers lost their horrors for him after the first few days - after all they spared him the act of committing suicide. (p. 28)

From four cases of isolation the same story is told, that isolation is a world of death. So much so, that the prisoner learns to welcome it and understand the freedom it offers.

Frankl also saw a strategic reaction developing in the captives. His conclusion is consistent with those of the other authors: that presented with the scene of isolation and death, the prisoner must react out of self defense into a perspective of self preservation.

Apathy, the main symptom of the second phase, was a necessary mechanism of self defense. Reality dimmed, and all efforts and all emotions were centered on one task: preserving one's own life and that of the other fellow. (p. 44)

Like the earlier strategies of self preservation, Frankl characterizes his own as transcendent. He also sought freedom in his human ability to choose.

Man can preserve a vestige of spiritual freedom, of independence of mind, even in such terrible conditions of psychic and physiological distress . . . everything can be taken from a man but one thing; the best of the human freedoms - to choose one's own attitudes in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way. (p. 104)

Frankl witnesses not only the reaction of men to an abnormal destructive environment, but isolation reveals to him something about the state of man.

The progress of Frankl's conclusions follows the basic pattern. He has lost his past self, has become familiarized with death, and realized the need for self preservation. What follows is the definition of man's freedom through his freedom of choice. From these conclusions, Frankl formulated his existential model of man. This model characterizes man as alone, in an environment hostile to him, and where the only influence his self can purvey is through the act of choice. How great is the similarity and function of Frankl's existential self image to that of the indestructible persona. Frankl's conceptualization of the human condition in these terms became his theory of Logotherapy, which is his prescription for all people who find themselves at the mercy of their environment. He is suggesting to all who are alone and unable to influence their environment that they express themselves through choice, and become the indestructible persona that existentialism characterizes. That choice is a strategy in the individual's rhetoric of self.

Frankl also notes the role of religion in saving the lives of his campmates. The Jewish people, traditionally strong in their belief and their racial unity, find a sense of meaning and family closeness in communing through their religion. Frankl understands the role religion is fulfilling in the lives of his campmates, and realizes its strategic value to their goal of survival.

. . . there cannot exist in man any such thing as a moral drive, or even a religious drive, in the same manner we speak of man's being determined by basic instinct. Man is never driven to moral behavior; in each instance he decides to behave morally, man does not do so in order to satisfy a moral drive and to have a good conscience: he does so for the sake of a cause to which he commits himself, or for a person he loves, or for the sake of his god. (p. 158)

Frankl suggested that man makes the choice of behaving morally. In the

world of self to which these inmates are reduced, that choice is rhetorical one.

Frankl told of his own rhetorical choices as well. His God, his profession of healing, and his new image of man were all identities larger than himself, from which he gained meaning in his life. The text he was writing, later to become his book, assumed unproportional importance to him. His original manuscript was lost when he was first stripped of all possessions. He lived for its reconstruction, recalling his life's work and scribbling it down on bits of paper when he could find them. This work he necessarily kept concealed from the authority, for it could have meant his death. In his private life, his only life unviolated by his circumstance, his writing became a total symbol of self. Implicit in the social motivation of his writing is the attempt to gain meaning and transcendence through communicating to a society outside of prison.

Genet's life frame came in the form of identifying with a person he saw as free in isolation. Accompanying this strategy was homosexuality. For the people in Frankl's camp, there also is no outside society to contact. Nor is there a viable social organization within the camp. Also unlike the cases of the other authors, sexual frustration was no problem because of the extreme state of physical violation they suffered. In this situation, the possibility of finding any meaning or relationship with a real, free person was impossible. Thus, the strategy to fulfill the needs of the prisoner is transferred to a psychological level of combat. The minds of the prisoners constructed an image of free society, and they found fulfillment in contemplation of a person they loved.

In a position of utter desolation, when man cannot express himself in positive action, when his only achievement may consist of enduring his sufferings in the right way - an honorable way - in such a position a man can, through loving contemplation of the image he carries of his beloved, achieve fulfillment. (p. 59)

For Frankl, the image of his wife fills this role. Although he claimed to have struck out his former life, Frankl finds a sense of inner life in recalling the past.

Had I known then that my wife was dead, I think that I still would have given myself, undisturbed by that knowledge, to the contemplation of her image, and that my mental conversation with her would have been just as satisfying . . . This intensification of inner life helped the prisoner find a refuge from the existence, by letting him escape into the past. (p. 61)

Genet also spoke of forgetting the present in the past. (p. 133) Like Genet, the mental image of the "free social operant" is fulfillment for Frankl. Unlike Jackson and Cleaver, he does not make this identification through a rhetorical medium of writing. It suffices for Frankl to control and choose in his mind, the only reserve left to him. Because his persuasive power is limited to mental control, Frankl's choices are a rhetoric of a mental appeal, designed to affect his well-being.

Frankl suggests another dimension to the 'Life Frame.' Since mental images are a viable strategy, Frankl employs a kind of bifurcation of the self. He saw himself as free in the past, that memory gave him refuge. He also projects himself into the future, where he saw himself lecturing to a group of colleagues about the horrors of concentration camps. His life's work did project him out of his situation, into the future where he would be free once again. By identifying with both his "past self" and "future self," Frankl transcends the present. The positivity involved in expecting a future demonstrates Frankl's success in dealing with his



environment. Such positivity is Frankl's life frame; he has transcended the death frame and posits himself into the social setting of his past life and the fabrication of a future.

### Expansion of the Model of Isolation Rhetoric

The cases of Genet and Frankl present two new aspects of a rhetoric of isolation. First, they demonstrate the difference of format and stylization that the rhetoric may take. Second, they emphasize the essential similarities of the rhetorical response to isolation despite the wide variation of the situations. The cases of these two authors serve to expand our understanding of isolation rhetoric and at the same time complete the categorizations of behavior we have already witnessed.

Genet's level is a symbolic level. He is able to persuade himself and gain control by manipulation of mental and visual symbols. Also by perceiving the symbolic interaction within his world, he is able to deliver to us a rhetorical level of understanding; the same way he himself interprets his environment. He writes very clearly of the effect that prison has had on him, his fellow prisoners, and even the world. Genet's symbolic level fills out another dimension to the visual model of isolation rhetoric. While the distinct pattern of life - death strategies is not as apparent in Genet's case as it was in the previous cases, Genet describes another state of isolation even more fully. Where Jackson and Cleaver's strategies of the black movement served them best, Genet has built his home. In this world of isolation, or the state of adaptation, Genet finds the walls of his reality. He calls this state "The Kingdom of Darkness and Transparency." It represents for us the absolute status of internalized isolation. For Genet, absolute isolation is absolute freedom. Prison is his world, his society, his being. His life-death strategies take place within this completely closed world. Genet realized how completely he was severed from our world, and therefore pronounced himself dead. In this death-being, his strategies were aimed at finding life. Within the

completely closed system, his strategies are analogous to the life-death strategies of Jackson and Cleaver and perform the same functions of survival and transcendence. (See fig. 6) Genet's isolation and his symbolic understanding by which he interprets it give us a new understanding of the actions of the other authors: that they were seeking to reaffirm life in a world of death. Frankl, too, is in a state of complete isolation. His isolation is accompanied by extreme physical and mental abuse. His resources for survival must, like Genet's, come in a purely symbolic form. To carry out his strategic battle for control of his mind, Frankl adopts strategies of mental imagery. The important similarity of the cases is that they find meaning in the same places: through a higher life and indestructible persona, and through love. (See fig. 7)

Frankl was able to perceive these responses in himself and his campmates. From this information, he developed the Theory of Logotherapy, a perspective which claims these choices as a prescriptive source for happiness. Frankl suggests his existential model of man as a viable self image. This self image performs the function of giving the individual an indestructible persona. He suggests that man can find meaning in a higher cause, or a self-committment. Frankl finds meaning in his god, his fellow man and in his healing profession. Frankl emphasizes that man has the choice for these actions; again a choice to find life. As a strategy of love, the mental image of his wife provides a semblance of "other," and psychological affirmation of life in a merciless environment of death.

Frankl's case gives us three important ideas: 1) that man makes the choice to gain meaning and happiness through affecting his self-perception; 2) that the act of choice is the essence of human freedom; and 3) that the choices of the isolated may serve as viable lessons for people in society.

OPEN  
SOCIETY

DEATH FRAME

choosing identity

LIFE FRAME

choosing social activity

OPEN  
SOCIETY

"I am severed  
from your world,  
I am therefore DEAD."

"KINGDOM of DARKNESS"

- ISOLATION -

"prison regulations  
are one of the  
factors which will  
shape the hearts  
and brains of  
murderers."

Indestructible  
PERSONA—

"the tough"

"the crusher"

"the warrior"

"HARCAMEL  
built his life  
stone by stone"

"prison has  
become the  
cells of my  
fissures"

"The roots of all great social  
movements are found in prison"

(1) divers  
"warrior"  
accepted prison.  
(2) HARCAMEL  
condemned to  
death. "rough  
beauty of the  
warrior"

"AT ITS HEART ARE SOLITARY  
CONFINEMENT AND THE DISCIPLINARY  
CELL."

"THE MIRACLE OF THE ROSE"  
(chains of bondage flower into freedom)

THE EXISTENTIAL HERO

"You are the master of your  
time and thinking"

← LOVE

— Seeking free operant  
in prison world.  
identifies with "HERO" of  
DEATH FRAME

FRIENDSHIP—  
"they raise friendship  
to the loftiest levels."

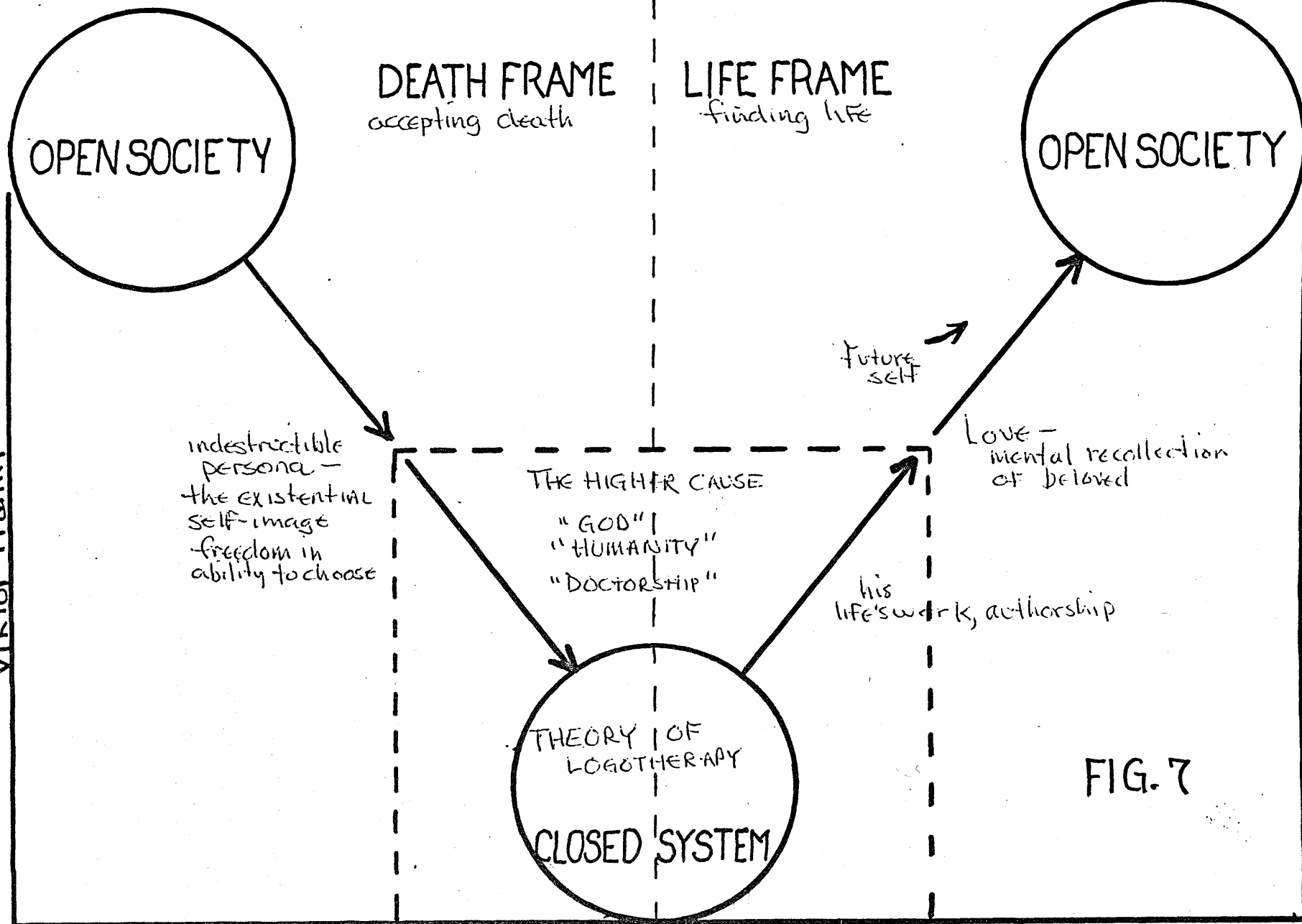
writing as means  
of self-projection

"conjoining darkness"  
— return to past  
self.

"the circular mirror"  
— communion of  
isolated society

Jean Genat

FIG. 6



In chapter four, the similarity of Frankl's choices and those of the other isolation cases will be used to expand our visual model to include his philosophical and psychological conclusions. The expanded model will then be used to examine his prescriptive conclusion: that the choices of the isolated can be used as a model for the choices of people in society.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE DIMENSIONS OF A RHETORIC OF ISOLATION

In the course of this study, I found it useful to develop the visual model built from the analysis of the prison authors. The style and type of responses seen in these cases constitute the different strategies of the rhetoric of isolation. They are analogous in purpose, goal and design. The strategies are similar in that they are generated by the isolation of prison confinement; they are identical in the sense that they are all strategies of survival.

Survival is possible only through power. The "psychic" survival of the prisoners was sought through personal power, or the power of the self. One conclusion from the cases of these authors is that the self must maintain power resources if it is to survive. By itself, it can and is destroyed by isolation. The strategies adopted by these men over the time of their confinement were designed to develop alternate sources of power. In becoming the indestructible persona, the prisoners derived power by assuming a character who, with his rhetorical manner and philosophic strategy, was powerful.

In adopting a higher identity, a self-alignment with a cause or god, the prisoners gained power; power to persuade society and power to transcend prison life. By becoming the heroes in such movements, the prisoners sought and gained the power to persuade others. By adopting a strategy

of love, the prisoners sought to gain power from the freedom of a social operant, or, as in the case of Genet, the power of the isolated hero.

The components of the scenes in which the prisoners made their strategic choices are similar not only in the feature of isolation, but in the prisoners' more specific situation and in the similar feelings they attached to their circumstance. The sameness of their needs and goals establishes a pattern to isolation. The sameness of their strategies constitutes a pattern to their rhetoric, a pattern described by the model. The different media used for their strategies or the difference in stylistic response gives us the dimensions of a rhetoric of isolation.

The progressive building of the model as it occurs through the study indicates three dimensions or levels of isolation rhetoric. From analysis of this pattern we can conclude a fourth dimension: a prescriptive level, where any individual's choices can be cast as a response to some form of isolation. In the cases of Jackson and Cleaver, there is a behavioral and political level of response. The media they use is a combination of rhetorical action and racial analysis. For instance, they use the love letter as a rhetorical format, and the prison letter as a diary of their lives. The form and content of their rhetoric constitutes a behavior-political dimension of the model. They choose to take real action and seek real change in society as a consequence. Their involvement with their rhetoric, however, is still a strategy of self-address. Genet gives us a symbolic perspective on the effect of isolation. To accomplish this he describes for us his own rhetoric of selfhood as it creates his own personal world. His media of survival is the intellectual inversion of his reality and the mental powers that inversion grants him. His media of communication is writing, in this case an autobiographical novel, The Miracle of the Rose. His



writing, too, is a strategy of survival. Frankl perceives a psychological relationship in the rhetoric of isolation. His conclusions about man, developed in isolation and by observing the isolated, are extrapolated to consider theological and philosophical conclusions about man. This is the psychological-philosophical level of isolation rhetoric. It is Frankl's perspective which offers the conclusive final dimension to the rhetoric of isolation: the prescriptive level where he suggests that the experiences of the isolated are analogous to those of persons living in society.

Based upon the progress of the visual model and the relationships it describes, it is justifiable to consider the dimensions of a rhetoric of isolation in three separate frames: The Death Frame, where the predominate strategy is the indestructible persona; The Life Frame, where love is a strategy of life; and The World of Isolation, representing a state of internalized isolation. (See fig. 8)

#### The Death Frame

The scene of death was characterized by the perceptions and feelings of all four authors. In the Death Frame, there is an immediacy to the reality of death. Death is present in the symbolic but very real death of the identity which entered prison. There exists within prison a sensation of death, for prisoners with incorrect behavior might never leave prison alive. With the physical and mental decaying a prisoner witnesses in his fellow inmates, he can easily project himself into a similar future. The need is there to fight this reality, to in some way seek life despite the irresponsive death environment. From the prisoner's concern with death emerges an understanding of death as a final freedom.

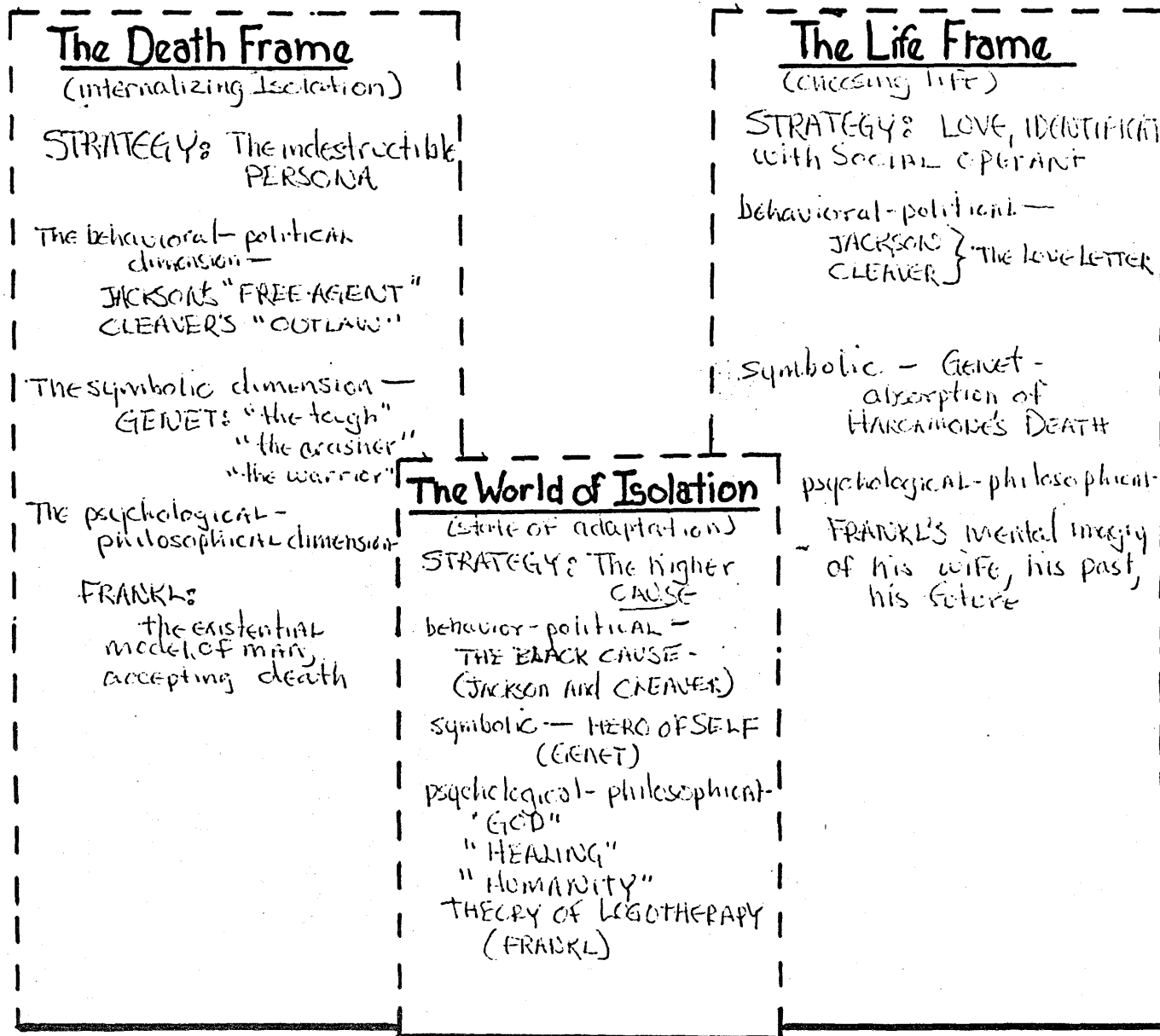


FIG 8

The death experience is a product of the internalizing process of isolation. As the prisoner is increasingly adapting to his environment, he is able to witness the progressive disintegration of a former self and a former freedom. He also realizes that the only escape from this process is through the exercise of his last freedom: the freedom to choose. The choices of action and psychological combat that our authors made can be reduced to one essential choice: the choice of self. The requirements of their death environment make that choice an intentional self change into a more successful character. The character needed to survive in isolation is the indestructible persona. The cases of the authors provide four different examples of this development and three different forms its expression may take.

Jackson's free agent persona had a predominate value of self-determination. Control over the determining factors of his life became ultimately important. Jackson's environment was determined by isolation. His self determination therefore took the form of rhetorical behavior. He chose the actions which led to his perpetual solitary confinement, he supposedly chose the act of murder, and he indeed chose to express himself in the limited communication of his letters. Cleaver's choices were also those of rhetorical action. He determined that "he could act - not simply react." In becoming the outlaw rapist, he was affirming his life and freedom through rhetorical action. In both of these cases of the indestructible persona, there is the possibility of at least limited action and self expression. Together they constitute a behavioral and political dimension of the response to death.

Genet has been characterized in most criticisms as an existentialist. This is suggested by his lack of higher identity than himself, his flair for his rhetoric of selfhood, and, perhaps most importantly, his understanding that the self is in a constant state of change. Genet's existential self image is a symbolic indestructible persona. His adoption of different characters, "the tough," "the crasher," "the warrior," are the expression of that symbolic rhetoric in a medium of self persuasion. His stylistic manipulation of symbols, his writing, and his thievery are also rhetorical behavior. His understanding of that behavior, however, provides another level to the analysis of isolation rhetoric: the symbolic dimension.

Frankl's perspective on isolation behavior, and the choices that he himself made, are also on a symbolic level. Yet his psychological analysis brings us to a third dimension of the pattern. This level is characterized by the psychological-philosophical orientation of Frankl's conclusions. In the Theory of Logotherapy, Frankl communicated an existential self image. Like Jackson's self determination, Cleaver's outlaw, and Genet's own existentialism, this self image is an indestructible persona. It is a character designed to withstand a destructive environment. Frankl's conclusions suggest one thing about the validity of the indestructible persona: that if it is a viable strategy to withstand an environment which kills, it is a viable strategy to combat a social environment which contains and oppresses the self. From this suggestion we can draw a fourth dimension to isolation rhetoric; that is that the indestructible persona behavior we can witness in the open society is virtually the same strategy that the prisoners used.

Existentialism has been a broadly sweeping philosophical movement in the twentieth century. Many modern philosophers and psychologists are pointing to the contemporary experience of social alienation as one reason for existentialism's mass acceptance.<sup>2</sup>

This information leads to one conclusive suggestion: that the scene of isolation is an exigence to a stylized rhetorical choice in cases of both physical confinement and social alienation. The response in either case is similar, an individual may develop a persona which is successful in an oppressive, hostile environment. The existential self image is one such persona.

### The World of Isolation

The world of isolation is defined by the closed system of a prison. It represents a reality that the prisoners encounter when they find that their indestructible persona is yet an isolated, meaningless self. It is a scene that encompasses the entire situation and the self thus situated. As yet, the isolated individual has not found adequate social participation nor a viable social role to give him the persuasive power he needs. Those needs determine the strategy of the higher cause. The individual attempts to see himself as an integrated part of a greater identity, and from that larger purpose he derives meaning in life and transcendence of his death.

Genet is the master of the world of isolation. He described this "Kingdom of Darkness" as the place where reveries of the great social

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<sup>2</sup>The subject of alienation in modern society is the framework of a great amount of twentieth century literature. One anthology of this literature, Man Alone, edited by Eric and Mary Josephson, suggests the relationship between existentialism and social alienation. Man Alone attempts to characterize the stylistic and psychological responses to alienation found in a society increasingly burdened with that problem.

movements take place. He saw this scene as being encompassed and contained by the walls of his mind. "At its heart," he wrote, "are solitary confinement and the disciplinary cell." Those symbols of absolute isolation are the center of this scene, which is itself a scene of absolute isolation. It is absolute isolation because the prisoner has accepted it as such.

The strategies of the higher cause found in the cases of the prisoners follow the same progression through the various dimensions of rhetoric. The black ideal filled the needs of both Jackson and Cleaver. It granted them a sense of "being" because of the activity in which they were engaged, and it granted them a reason for being by placing them within the operation of a greater design. At this point, their self preservation was no longer an adequate reason for rhetorical action. Yet, they had to involve themselves in the rhetorical process in order to survive. The adoption of a social purpose solved this curious dilemma.

Genet's higher life is different and yet similar. Genet performs an intellectual inversion of symbolic realities. Isolation, and his ubiquitous self become his higher life. They are, for him, an ideal reality where he operates in freedom. As Jackson and Cleaver were the heroes of their ideal worlds, Genet is the hero of his own. Jackson and Cleaver became the master of a symbolic reality. Hereagain is the progression of the behavioral level to the symbolic.

Frankl, as the title of his book suggests, was in a search for meaning. In his isolation, he found meaning in those parts of himself attached to a higher identity and purpose. His god was one such source. He considered himself a part of humankind, and felt called by that identity to deliver his work and understanding of man. Healing was a source of gratification for Frankl. His "doctorship" became his mission in life. In that sense, he

too, was a master of ideal reality.

The persona that emerged from this scene expressed themselves in a similar manner. They all became the master of a higher life, and did so by becoming a rhetorical hero. Their dreams and ideals took on a concrete form as they authored their separate works. Authorship, too, was a strategy of self purpose and self integration with a society. The authors created ideal states of life, and projected themselves out of their situation by living that ideal in their minds.

In this scene we again see the different levels of the strategy. The behavioral, the symbolic and the philosophical dimensions of the higher cause strategy suggest that we may see this strategy in social environments as well as in prison. Eric Hoffer in The True Believer, supports that general assumption. In Hoffer's investigation into the appeal of the mass movement, he concludes that the appeal of rhetoric lies in the needs of people, not in the particular value of the rhetoric. He wrote, "When people are ripe for a mass movement, they are ripe for any effective movement, not solely for one with a particular doctrine or program." (p.25 ) The effectiveness of the movement is decided by its ability to fulfill the needs of people. Hoffer sees these needs as the same needs of the prisoners.

One of the most potent attractions of a mass movement is its offering of a substitute for individual hope . . . when our needs and prospects do not seem worth living for, we are in desperate need of something apart from us to live for. (p. 23)

Hoffer's description of "the true believer" includes a good description of our prisoners. The prisoners he is analyzing, however, live in society.

### The Life Frame

The life frame is also a rhetorical scene. It is characterized by the positive choice a prisoner makes to act out life, rather than accept or internalize death. Although the strategies of life are positive, the prisoner is still very much isolated. He is perhaps even more isolated than in the previous frames, for he has come to see freedom as a society unavailable to him. To share in that freedom requires that he abandon himself, his indestructible persona, and his ideal reality. He returns to these strategies, but only because he returns to death.

Jackson and Cleaver again pursued this strategy on a behavioral level. The rhetorical form they used was the love letter. In their love letters, the destroyed self and the racial rhetoric are both there, but as communicators of love rather than strategies themselves. The love strategies of these black American authors were concocted in the scene of their availability, with contact from society. In the cases of Genet and Frankl, there is no contact from outside the closed system. Their choices of social action and love are nonetheless choices of life.

Genet finds love in the real sense of his homosexuality. He also finds love in the symbolic reality he has built. His greatest love for the condemned murderer, Harcamone, was began and completed on a purely symbolic, intellectual level. Genet sought social contact. His strategy is the complete identification and absorption of another person. Just as Jackson and Cleaver sought a person who was free, Genet seeks a social operant who is, to his mind, free. In Genet's inverted world of death, that free agent is a person condemned to death. In all of his loves, Genet seeks the person who characterizes the indestructible persona of the death frame. For Genet, like the other authors, love is a strategy to vicariously



share in the freedom of another person.

Frankl's strategy of love is not fulfilling in the completely symbolic medium of Genet. In Frankl's psychological level, his love takes place through mental imagery. Frankl's situation is different from the other authors in that the availability of their love strategies is not possible. His love must come in pure psychic manipulation. By merely recalling an image of his wife, Frankl finds freedom and well-being. Frankl also presents another aspect of life strategies. One of his strategies is a self identification with the image of his future success. The "future self" strategy is possible only on the purely mental level of action. It reaffirms that he is choosing life in society as freedom.

Strategies of life are also found in the social setting. Love is the pretext for many actions of success. They range from an obvious level of marriage (a strategy to combat isolation) to the same behavioral, symbolic, mental and generally rhetorical dimensions of the prisoners. One such process of identification is the individual's vicarious life through a leader, a hero, or an emblematic figure of success. Hoffer notes the value this process of love gives to the frustrated of society. He writes, "The frustrated are also likely to be the most steadfast followers. Surrender to a leader is not a means to an end, but a fulfillment in itself." (p.110) Love is an obvious strategy to combat isolation of any kind. The individual identifies with an attractive social figure in an attempt to gain that attractiveness for himself. In selecting a figure of success to imitate and in selecting goals to achieve, the individual is selecting a future self. The strategy is to share in the hero's glory and achieve the same life, freedom and success that he enjoys.

## Summary and Conclusions:

### The Model of Human Choices

The fourth dimension of isolation rhetoric suggests the applicability of the model to all individuals. In examining the types of choices that people make and the different types of isolation to which they are reacting, one conclusion emerges: that all actions and choices take place in a scene of isolation, for the self is essentially alone regardless of his specific situation. It follows that all choices are made with the same essential purpose, to avoid death and reaffirm life. From this philosophic analysis of life our model is expanded into a model of human choice. (See fig. 9)

The conclusions of this study come on three different levels:

1) Practical conclusions, 2) Rhetorical applications, and 3) Philosophical conclusions regarding the implications of the model.

The practical level of this study, a study of prisoners and their environment, suggests something about the act of institutionalizing "criminals" for the purpose of "reformation." George Jackson went to prison for stealing seventy dollars from a gasoline station. He did not leave prison alive. Prison did not reform him in the desired manner. It led to his disillusionment, his embitterment, and his act of murder. It concluded with his death. Eldridge Cleaver went to prison for smoking marijuana, he re-entered society as a rapist. Prison had changed him indeed. Genet took to thievery to free himself "from a life taken up with prostitution and begging." Criminality offered him this vital self change, not prison. If the process of internalizing the prison environment consists of relabelling that reality as freedom, then the prisoner may find return to society just as difficult a process. Cleaver and Genet provide good examples of this.

## AWARENESS OF DEATH

strategy to deal  
with inevitable  
death

## ACCEPTANCE OF LIFE

strategy to experience  
society, "success"

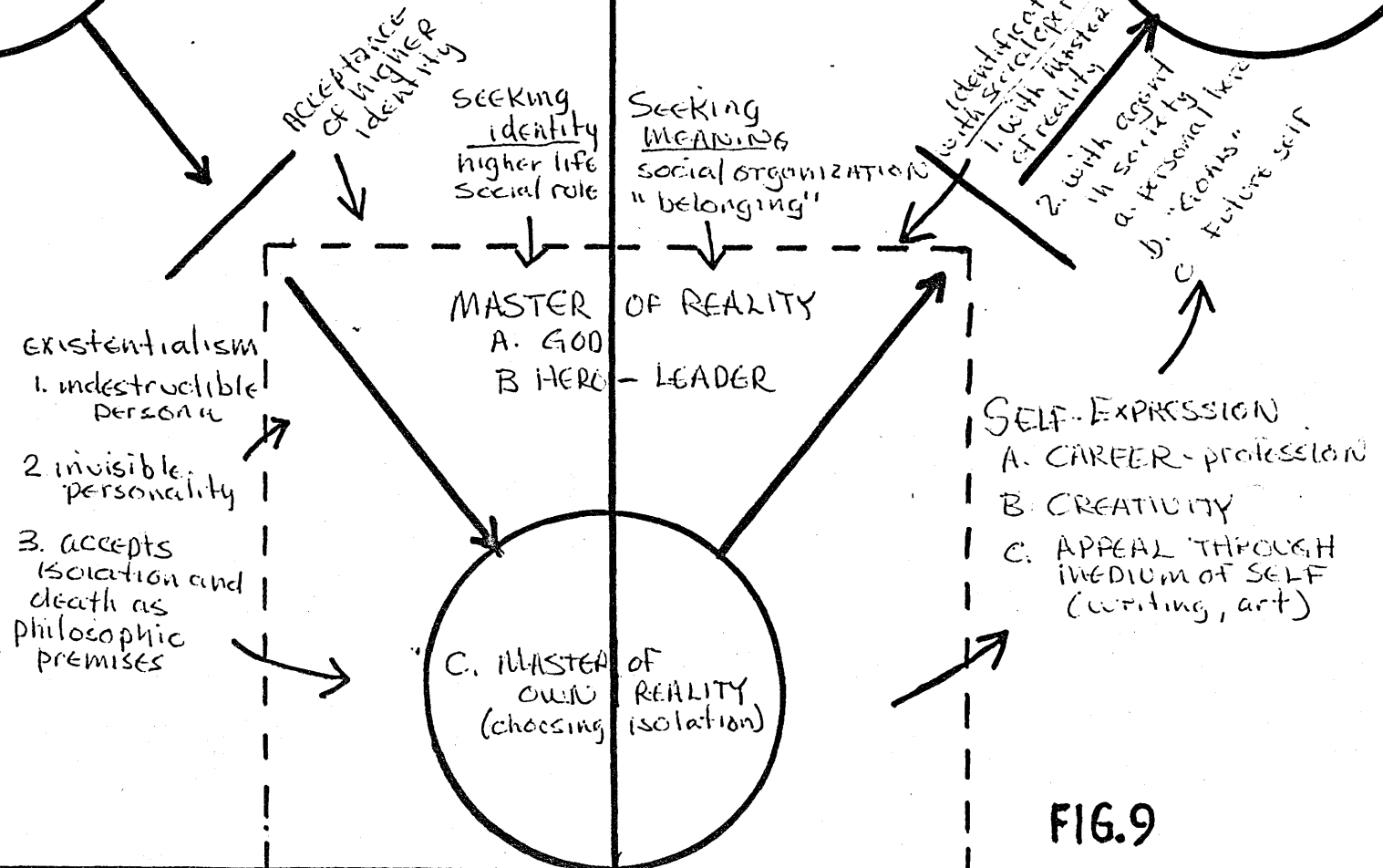


FIG.9

Model of Available Choice

The usefulness of the concept of rhetoric to the critic could be aided by the understanding of isolation this study explores. Much rhetorical criticism is oriented around the source of the rhetoric and the media by which it is communicated. Very little concern has been centered wholly upon the true consequence of rhetorical appeal; why the individual chooses to accept and be persuaded by the appeal. Frankl concluded that man chose to behave morally for the sake of a higher cause, that man was not instinctively driven to moral behavior. A rhetoric of isolation attempts to posit one suggestion for the individual's choice of the higher cause: that individuals involve themselves in the rhetorical process to mitigate the effect of isolation.

Finally, the rhetoric of isolation attempts a philosophical explanation for the rhetorical choices of individuals. It casts the decisions of existentialist thought, rhetorical mass movements, and of love as a result of one essential exigence: man's aloneness in an irresponsive world. Man's inherent isolation and his need to deal with both life and death characterizes the scene and the sense of his decisions in life. Every man is alone in the world, with the need to escape death by finding life. In William Righter's book, The Rhetorical Hero, he characterizes modern man in the same philosophic description; as a person who must find life by choosing a successful self. He wrote:

Consequently there is a sense in which the 'art of choice' reflects a far-reaching view of human personality, where the very notion of man involves choices and decisions, where character is almost constructed in eclectic fashion out of a heterogeneous sprinkling of qualities and talents. Having no viable tradition, 'no faith, no beliefs or ideology . . . ' modern man must assemble an image of himself out of the materials available, and in an age of crisis which has put so much of the human past in doubt, this involves a careful choosing among the elements of human accomplishment. (p. 77)

Allow me to assert that people make their greatest changes when their past seems to have nothing to do with their future. This is the situation the prisoner necessarily encounters when he enters isolation. When the breakdown of tradition and the splintering of our cultural identity, our spastically but rapidly changing society often presents the same scene to the bulk of modern man.

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